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RUEHPO/AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO PRIORITY 1148
RUEHPU/AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE PRIORITY 4711
RUEHSP/AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN PRIORITY 1849
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTO DOMINGO 002365

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STATE FOR WHA/CAR

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SUBJECT: SANTO DOMINGO POLITICAL ROUNDUP, OCTOBER 19, 2007

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Roland W. Bullen, Reasons 1.4(b), (d)

11. (SBU) During the October 15-16 visit of Country Officer Christopher Ward, WHA/CAR and Post engaged Dominican contacts on Haiti, election rules, human rights, Venezuela, and other issues. Alejandra Liriano, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, said that the bilateral relationship had been strong for many years and singled out the DR-CAFTA process for praise. Liriano noted that one problem persists: Dominican concern that U.S. military operations in Iraq had diverted resources from the counter-narcotics fight in the Caribbean and Latin America.

12. (SBU) The Deputy Minister also briefed on Dominican preparations for meetings of the Dominican-Haitian Mixed Bilateral Commission (CMB), the multi-agency effort that Presidents Fernandez and Preval have re-launched (after several years of inactivity) to address bilateral issues. Liriano described a GODR inter-agency process underway to determine what agenda items would be proposed to the Haitians (there will be six in total) and which agencies would participate in CMB sub-commissions. In a separate meeting, Miguel Fersobe, the Assistant Secretary for Haitian Affairs, noted that Fernandez had issued a decree naming the members of the Dominican delegation. Fersobe said that, during a visit to Port-au-Prince in September, Haitian officials had assured him that Preval would issue a similar decree soon.

13. (SBU) In a meeting with Sonia Pierre, General Coordinator of the Movement for Dominican-Haitian Women (MUDHA), we inquired about the current issues of concern for Dominican persons of Haitian descent. Pierre showed us a news article in which an official from the Central Elections Board (JCE), which is the GODR body which issues cedula (national identity cards), touted the cancellation of 17,000 cedula which had allegedly been issued fraudulently. Pierre described the identity card cancellation program as targeted at persons of Haitian descent, and said that the JCE is now applying retroactively the Supreme Court's 2005 ruling that children born to undocumented immigrants are not entitled to Dominican citizenship. Pierre cited recent episodes related to persons of Haitian descent who had held cedula for many years. When these individuals attempted to document their children, they had their own cedula cancelled -- on the

JCE's grounds that that the parent could not prove that their own parents (i.e. the current child's grandparents) had been in the country legally.

¶4. (SBU) Pierre also expressed concern regarding the GODR's initiative to document birth without conveying nationality (the Libro de Extranjeria), which she described as discriminatory. She also said that the recent deployment of the military's new border unit, CESFRONT, has generated a series of complaints from Haitians subjected to immigration raids, as well as from their Dominican employers.

¶5. (SBU) In a meeting with officials from FINJUS (Foundation for Institutionalality and Justice) -- Executive VP Servio Tulio Castanos and Director of Projects Carlos Villaverde -- the NGO officials praised the USG's funding of organizations striving for improved democracy and governance. Castanos said that the structure of the Dominican Republic's anti-corruption agencies is strong, but that these agencies suffer from a lack of sufficient independence from the executive branch. Turning to a new set of election regulations proposed by the JCE, Villaverde averred that the intention of the rules is good, since the country needs to reign in its lengthy and freewheeling election campaigns. The rules themselves are strong, he argued; however, a serious constitutional problem exists in that the rules are de facto legislation and cannot be simply implemented by the JCE -- they must be drafted as a law and considered by the Congress.

¶6. (C) Ramon Alburquerque, President of the opposition Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD), agreed with FINJUS' analysis, telling us that the party believes that the JCE's campaign rules cannot be enacted without congressional approval. Alburquerque also praised U.S. support for anti-corruption efforts and said that much is riding on the verdict in the BANINTER bank fraud trial, which will be announced on October 21. He said that he was concerned that Cardinal Nicolas Lopez Rodriguez had provided (unspecified) support to the fraud trial's defendants, and then described the head of the Catholic Church here as "unstable." Finally, Alburquerque lamented that the good work of democracy and governance NGOs has not been rewarded with a higher level of financial support from domestic sources. Turning to an NGO whose work he does not support, Alburquerque said that the far-left Alternative Social Forum (FSA) was receiving funds from foreign governments. When POLOFF inquired regarding which government he was referring to, the PRD President said that, while he cannot be sure, he believes that Venezuela has provided financing to the Forum.

¶7. (SBU) Frank Soto, Assistant Attorney General for Anti-Trafficking, told us that the GODR had improved its coordination on TIP efforts. A presidential decree has been issued establishing an inter-agency council which will develop and implement a national anti-TIP strategy. The council replaces an ad hoc working group, and Soto believes it will benefit considerably from the addition of representatives from the Ministry of Interior and Police and the Office of the First Lady. The Assistant Attorney General was critical of recent press coverage of the deportation without charges of a German citizen who the media described a suspect in a TIP case. Soto said that press had confused two individuals and that, in fact, the Ministry was actively prosecuting the case and has a different German national currently in detention.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: Any meeting of the long dormant Mixed Bilateral Commission would be a promising development in relations between the two countries that share Hispaniola. We suspect that the CMB will begin by picking low hanging fruit and will steer clear of any serious attempt to address, in this first series of meetings, the highly charged issue of documentation for Dominicans of Haitian descent. On October 16, the ruling PLD party joined other voices in stating that the JCE's draft election rules must be enacted by law. This is not the first time that Cardinal Lopez's alleged actions have raised controversy; nevertheless, it is rare to hear

such direct criticism here. Given the importance of accountability for the BANINTER bank fraud, Alburquerque's allegations, if true, would be deeply troubling.

(U) This report and additional information can be found on Embassy Santo Domingo's SIPRNET site,
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/santodomingo/>
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